

Proponent Testimony  
SB 112 – Dylan Steigers' Protection of Youth Athletes Act  
March 15, 2013 to the House Education Committee

Good afternoon Chair Hansen, Members of the Committee, my name is Kristen Morgan (M-O-R-G-A-N), and I am the Program Director of the Brain Injury Alliance of Montana (BIAMT). I am pleased to testify today on behalf of the Alliance to express its strong support of SB 112. As you may know, BIAMT is the statewide, grassroots, education and advocacy organization for children and adults living with disability due to brain injury. Founded in 1987, primarily by parents with the help and involvement of medical and rehabilitation professionals, BIAMT is affiliated with the United States Brain Injury Alliance, and one of 44 sister organizations in states across the country. Our shared mission is to promote research, prevention, education, and advocacy. While the bulk of BIAMT's time and modest resources are devoted to assisting children, adults and families adapt and cope with the too often life-changing consequences of brain injury; our organization is dedicated above all to prevention. Many of our members are motivated to speak out about their experiences with brain injury, and promote safety practices that, if followed, could spare others from the devastating losses they have known. In the case of youth athletes who experience negative consequences from unrecognized, untreated and poorly managed concussions, they and their families lament, "if only we'd known!"

Today we ask you to support SB 112 so that Montana's young athletes, their parents, guardians, and coaches do know about concussions in sports, and that they are provided educational materials available through the Centers for Disease Control and Injury Prevention ([www.cdc.gov/Concussion](http://www.cdc.gov/Concussion)). All involved need to know the signs and symptoms of concussions which can show up right after the injury or may not appear or be noticed until days after the injury. Additionally, they need to realize that most concussions occur without loss of consciousness, but can be caused by a bump, blow or jolt to the head or body. Suspected concussions in youth sports need to be taken seriously as children and teens are more likely to get a concussion and take longer to recover than adults. Brain injury is the leading cause of sports-related deaths to children, <http://www.safekids.org/our-work/research/fact-sheets/sport-and-recreation-safety-fact-sheet.html>, however, recognition and proper response to concussions when they first occur can help prevent further injury, permanent disability or even death. SB 112 serves to protect Montana's youth athletes, as well, by incorporating provisions consistent with those recommended by the CDC and promoted by the National Federation of State High School Associations including those related to: removing an athlete from play when a concussion is suspected; ensuring the athlete is

evaluated by a healthcare professional experienced in evaluating for concussion; and prohibiting return to play until the athlete has been medically cleared by a healthcare professional (experienced in evaluating for concussions) who finds the athlete to be symptom free.

I feel it is important to mention that we are not asking anyone to develop educational materials. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) provides free educational materials which provide a consistent message for athletes, parents, coaches, and physicians. Today each of you is receiving a packet of some of the materials available from the CDC. The CDC also provides online education for coaches and physicians. I have also included in your packet sample forms from North Carolina and Utah. These forms could easily be modified for Montana and provided to the school districts in electronic format. It is wonderful to see the Board of School Districts, Montana High School Association, and the Montana Medical Association working together on this important issue. By working together these forms can be easily adapted to Montana.

In closing, sixty-three percent (63%) of all the sports-related injuries captured in the BIAMT data are among youth ages 18 and younger (70/112). Of those sixty-eight percent (68%) are between thirteen and sixteen years old. From our perspective the risk of sustaining a concussion is present in all sports; whether school sponsored or other organized sports. All youth athletes deserve and need to receive consistency in concussion protocol including education, assessment, management, and return to play. Your support of SB 112 can effectively reverse the current trend, and help preserve the health, well-being and prospects of our most valuable asset – Montana's children and youth.

Sincerely,

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